



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEB. 6, 2007

CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

OFFICE – 928-871-7917

CELL – 928-309-8532

pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo Vice President Ben Shelly addresses N.M. legislature, encourages support for Desert Rock project, water rights bills

SANTA FE, N.M. – Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly thanked New Mexico legislators for their continued support of the San Juan River Water Settlement agreement here last week, and urged all Native people to get behind it as it begins the process to find funding in the U.S. Congress.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley and I, we’re in full support of the water settlement of the San Juan River here,” the Vice President said in the New Mexico Roundhouse Rotunda Feb. 2.

“We’ve been working on this for years and years. And I’ve been a part of the council delegates when we debated the issue and it went through the Navajo Nation Council and then it went out to the legislators.”

The annual New Mexico Legislature Indian Day celebration highlighted contributions of the 22 pueblos, tribes, and nations of New Mexico and their positive relationships with Governor Bill Richardson and the legislature.

This year’s theme was “Water: Sustaining Life, Traditions and Culture.” New Mexico Indian Affairs Cabinet Secretary Benny Shendo, Jr., of Jemez Pueblo, recognized tribes that have been actively involved in water rights settlement cases. The Vice President told the New Mexico House of Representatives that he and President Shirley believed in working together as the only way to take care of our people and the Navajo Nation.”

“We all know about the settlement,” he told them. “Let’s support it and move forward.”

The Vice President also encouraged support of HB 178, the Navajo Nation Electric Facility Tax Credits, which will assist in the construction of the Desert Rock Energy Project.



Navajo Nation Vice President Ben Shelly addressed the New Mexico Legislature during Indian Day on Feb. 2. He urged legislators to support the tax credit for the Desert Rock Energy Project and appropriations for Native American water rights settlements.

LeRoy Sanchez Photo

"We need to move forward with that," he said. "You need it. I need it. Your people need it. Our people out there are without jobs and employment. We need economic development. The state needs revenue. I know you do. So let's quit sitting on it and move forward with it."

He also credited long-time Sen. John Pinto for continuing to work hard despite getting on in years.

The Vice President also championed several bills working their way through the legislature. Among them are:

- HB 274, which would make a \$280 million appropriation to settle numerous Native water rights issues.
- HB 152, which would make a \$300,000 appropriation to implement the Indian arts and crafts certification mark program to protect Native artists and their work.
- HB 523, which would make a \$350,000 appropriation to the children, youth and families department to contract with a nonprofit organization for a fetal alcohol syndrome awareness pilot project.
- HB 92, which would limit fees and regulate payday loans, and amend the New Mexico small loan act of 1955.
- HB 444, Capital Outlay for Tribal Infrastructure Fund, and,
- SB 306, which would make a \$150,000 appropriation to the Indian affairs department to provide case management services to victims of radiation exposure or their surviving families located in New Mexico so that they

may access benefits due to them pursuant to the federal Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

Other bills the Navajo Nation supports include:

- The Native American Behavioral Health legislative appropriations bill.

The bill will provide supplemental funding to complete the construction of the Navajo Nation Regional Adult Residential Treatment Center in Shiprock, New Mexico.

The legislation will help the Navajo Nation to expand and enhance its behavioral health treatment services delivery system for Navajos who are afflicted with alcohol and substance abuse and co-occurring disorders.

Alcohol and substance abuse is a significant factor in half of all homicides, suicides and motor vehicle fatalities on the Navajo Nation.

Because of its integration of cultural teachings and traditional healing in the overall treatment process, this approach has been proven to effectively strengthen the recovery process.

The Navajo Nation expressed concerns about amendments to SB 579 violating Navajo sovereignty and possibly creating administrative problems for the State of New Mexico.

The Nation is working with the Indian Affairs Department to streamline its processes to effectively implement many capital outlay projects.

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